

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE COMMITTEE ON
NATURAL RESOURCES, TOURISM AND OUTDOOR RECREATION**

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House Bill 4111 – Volunteers on State Land

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Mr. Chairman and Committee Members:

Thank you for providing the Ruffed Grouse Society with the opportunity to comment on this legislation. The Ruffed Grouse Society is a nonprofit wildlife conservation organization dedicated to improving the environment for ruffed grouse, American woodcock, and other forest wildlife. The Society has approximately 25,000 members, representing over 125 active local chapters. A majority of these members reside and recreate in the Great Lakes region.

As an organization that has throughout its 50-year-history worked closely with the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) and other public land managing agencies, we strongly support House Bill 4111. The Society has supported these agencies in managing habitat for early successional or young forest wildlife both financially and through volunteer activities. We recently approved financial support of four habitat management projects on State Game Area and State Forest Land in Michigan.

Our members recognize that the forests in Michigan are maturing and that active management is necessary to provide the conditions that are needed to provide the habitat to support the populations of ruffed grouse and American woodcock that are desired by Michigan resident and nonresident sportspersons. Active management is also need by species such as the golden-winged warbler which has become a species of special concern because of the decrease in the amount of young forest habitat in Michigan.

In many situations these young forest conditions are being produced through commercial forest cutting. In other situations commercial operations are not possible because of stand size, timber value, or limited access by commercial equipment. In

these situations a noncommercial harvest or cutting is needed to regenerate the stand and produce the needed young forest condition.

Noncommercial forest cuttings and also plantings can be accomplished by volunteers from our local Ruffed Grouse Society chapters. Members are frequently contacting public land managing agencies looking for projects which will enhance wildlife populations and help the agencies fulfill their habitat management mandates. These weekend work projects are both beneficial for wildlife and also enjoyable and rewarding activities for the participants.

As a recently retired DNR wildlife supervisor, I am very aware of the impact of recent budget reductions on the agency's ability to meet its desired and mandated wildlife management obligations. One aspect of management that is being consistently cut back is wildlife surveys. The number of deer check stations has been significantly reduced in recent years. Ruffed grouse survey routes have been reduced and are only being surveyed every other year. Changes in wildlife populations are difficult to detect without annual population monitoring. Reduction in surveys may be necessary with reduced budgets, but this is one situation where volunteers can be of valuable assistance to the DNR. Ruffed Grouse Society chapters and their members are dispersed across the State of Michigan. Many of these members would be willing to take on ruffed grouse surveys where they live or where they own property. These surveys not only provide valuable management data, but are also very enjoyable to run.

Again, the Ruffed Grouse Society strongly supports House Bill 4111. Volunteers are needed to allow Michigan to continue to manage its valuable wildlife resources both for the present and for future generations.

Thanks you very much for the opportunity to speak to you today and I look forward to continuing to work with you in the future.